

"To save you from the ignominy of arrest."

"And by doing so have placed me in a far more incriminating position; one infinitely harder to explain. You did not think of that, Monsieur. You urged me to come with you; almost forced me to do so. You led me to believe your life was in danger if you remained in Chicago, yet refused to leave without me. You gave me that one choice, of coming with you, or compelling you to remain. In a moment of weakness I yielded; I fled with you. For your sake I have sacrificed my reputation, my good name. And now you tell me coolly, there was no cause, no occasion. Can I have heard aright, Monsieur?"

She had forgotten where we were, those hundreds of feet of air between us and the water below. Her eyes were dark with indignation; her hands grasped my arm, and her lips trembled. With pressure of my foot I slowed down the motor, and we floated, barely moving, the propeller scarcely audible. "If I plead guilty," I asked quietly, "will you take into consideration some extenuating circumstances?"

"Are there any? Could anything excuse such an act?" indignantly.

"That will depend upon yourself, Mademoiselle. In my own heart I am justified. There is an adage that all is fair in love and war; then surely the two combined excuse unusual methods. However I am willing to rest my case on the first—love!"

She drew back from me scornfully, but with no lowering of her eyes.

"Love! Are you sure you do not profane the word? Is compromising a girl your idea of love? You think they will not learn the truth back there in Chicago? that my friends will not hear? But they will; Schmitt will whisper it; that detective will not remain dumb. The gossip of it will creep from lip to lip, accompanied by many a sly smile. You can conceal crime by influence possibly, but all your consuls and ambassadors cannot curb scandal. Once in the air, it spreads. That is what your love has done for me, Monsieur."

I caught the upraised hand, and held it, in spite of her effort to draw away.

"That is enough; now listen to me," in a tone which quieted her. "You have played with me all night, but this is my turn to be heard. I am no boy, not to know my own mind. You insist love is not born in a night, but I doubt if it is ever born in any other way. Not you shall listen to every word I have to say. Mademoiselle, I have loved you ever since we sat in that restaurant alone together. I know not what made me your captive; that is mystery; but I confess the truth. Your doubt does not change the fact. I am a man, and have seen much of life; I have known many women of charm and beauty; I have pretended love, even while my heart scoffed at the possibility. I had reached a stage where I almost believed there was no such reality—that the conception of love was a mere dream, a boyish delusion, almost an insanity. Then I met you, looked into your face, listened to your voice, your laughter, gazed into the depths of your eyes—and awoke! I found your presence meant life to me—new life. It did not require a month, or a year, for me to learn this; it was the gift of a moment. From then until now I have had but one thought—you!"

She stared at me, fascinated by my earnestness, with lips parted, and cheeks flushed.

"But I told you—"

"Yes, you told me; you insisted I did not know my own mind; that because I was a Frenchman I possessed no stability. You laughed at me then, and I supposed that laughter represented your own feeling. It checked my audacity, but did not kill my love. I could not tell you all; you would not let me. Almost I thought you did not care. Then I saw your eyes in the glow of the lamp—caught glimpse of them when you were unconscious of their betrayal—and in their depths read my fate. You were not indifferent,

not heartless—you cared for me! Don't protest, Mademoiselle; I know. The night had worked two miracles. I cared no longer for the foil of your lips, for I had had a glimpse at your heart. It was then I resolved you should go with me—not to dishonor, but to peace. I could not wait; I had not the patience; I would bear you away as warriors did of old. I had found my mate, and I took you."

"But I—I am nothing," she urged, the tears in her eyes, "only an American working girl! Monsieur, you cannot mean—"

"Yet I do," I interrupted. "I have met queens, Mademoiselle, and princesses, but no pulse throbbed because of their presence. They were women, but nothing to me. You came to me out of the night; yesterday you did not even exist; yet here in the dawn you are the world. Whatever your name, your station—even though you have none—matters not at all. It is you, Mademoiselle, you I love; you whom I would call wife, and bear away with me across the seas to France. And you will come? Ah, surely, you will come?"

"Will I? You are so sure?"

I looked long into her eyes, misty with unshed tears dewing their lashes, yet frankly meeting mine.

"Yes, I am sure," I said slowly.

Her eyes fell, but her hand remained in mine, warm and throbbing. That was a strange place for love to speak, and I could not reach out my arms to draw her to me; I could only gaze at the flushed, averted face, wondering what she would say. Down below was the curving line of shore, rocky and desolate, the high bluff fringed with trees. With fingers grasping the wheels I swung the monoplane in wide circle to the right, and then permitted it to glide toward the earth with motor stopped, poising the frail craft just above the higher branches in slow flight.

"Do we land here, Monsieur?" "Beyond, in the open field," I answered, too busy even to glance about. "Look behind, and see if there are any vessels within viewing distance."

She turned partially in her seat, held firm by the strap, and gazed back under the shadow of an uplifted hand. There was an instant of silence; then a startled exclamation.

"It—it is a man! Look, - Monsieur!"

#### CHAPTER XXII.

##### FACE TO FACE IN MID-AIR.

It was a delicate moment for interruption, yet I could not ignore that cry, nor her sudden grasp on my arm. My heart leaped into my throat, yet I retained sufficient presence of mind to turn on the power, and by twist of the wheel sent the monoplane mounting into the sky. An instant we dipped perilously, ere the planes adjusted themselves, and I dare glance about.

"There," she sobbed in excitement. "It is a man! How did he ever get there?"

I could plainly see the form lying outstretched upon the steel wire, the hands gripping the light bamboo framework, the face hidden. The fellow was safe enough unless he deliberately thrust his body through the openings, yet the posture was sufficiently uncomfortable, and it was his weight, no doubt, which had made the monoplane so unmanageable. But how had he got there? Was he dead or alive? I shouted back at him, my voice carried by the wind, and in response to my second call, he lifted his head, revealing a face blackened by dried blood, but otherwise ghastly in its whiteness. I caught her quick gasp at my shoulder:

"Why! Why! it's Captain Brandt! I recognized him then, a peculiar feeling of revulsion seeming to choke me, as my hands gripped hard on the steering wheel. What was he doing there? How did he ever dare such a mad feat? Was it accident, or design that had made him a passenger? I was in noway surprised at not having discovered his presence before. I had felt the odd drag of the over-weighted

machine, the sodden slowness with which it responded to the rudder. I realized something must be wrong—that De Vigne had possibly overloaded it—and had glanced back more than once during our earlier flight. Yet in the darkness, and the great deceptive dawn, I had perceived nothing. Lying as he did, outstretched between the frames, he might easily have passed unnoticed. All these considerations flashed instantly across my mind, yet I possessed just then brief space for thought, as even his slight movement in the effort to uplift his head, so affected the equipoise of the plane as to send us careening in perilous fashion. Had we been equipped with warping gear instead of the more quickly manipulated ailerons, I doubt if I could have righted the frail craft, but as it was with a shudder, the great wings settled into stability, and we circled like a huge bird seeking to alight.

"Lie down, you fool!" I roared back over my shoulder. "Don't move again, if you value your life!"

I do not even know if he heard me, but Mademoiselle did, and I caught the thread of her voice calling to him also, and saw the motion of her hands. As for me I was far too busily occupied with levers and wheels to pay heed to anything else. We had already swept past the open field I had chosen for a landing place, yet I was obsessed now with an eagerness to attain solid earth. The very knowledge that the fellow—half mad with fright from the expression of his face—was clinging to the precarious support of that open framework gave me a feeling of terror. What he might do, or attempt, in his desperation, could not be guessed at, yet any effort on his part to change his position, to even rise to his knees, might hurl us headlong. The very secret of the plane, its stability in the air, its power of balancing, and swift response to the rudder, depended on the equal distribution of weight, the absence of any conflicting element. During the two hours of flight the man must have remained motionless and inert, perhaps unconscious—but now! Aroused, frightened, possibly insane at sudden discovery of his perilous position, there was no knowing what he might attempt. Our very lives hung in the balance, and the beads of perspiration clung to my forehead, and the blood seemed to stagnate in my veins.

"For God's sake keep him quiet!" I cried out to her, "until I can find a landing place. You hear?"

"Yes." I knew she answered; knew dimly that she unfastened the strap holding her firm in the seat, and turned her body so as to face him. It was in my mind to protest, to restrap her; I even reached out one hand for the buckle, but a sudden dip of the machine brought it instantly back to the steering wheel. I glanced down, desperate enough to accept any chance, my eyes surveying the scene below. We were above a country of woods and hills, interspersed by small lakes, connected by narrow streams, scarcely visible. I saw but one town, a mere hamlet, far-away to the right, nestled beside a body of shimmering water. Here and there amid the forest growth appeared small clearings, many of them covered by stumps of trees, but, a mile away, was an open field, an oasis in the wide stretch of forest, green with some vegetable growth. It beckoned me like some mystic hand. I was cool now, determined, my nerves like steel; every instinct alert.

"Hold tight, Mademoiselle; we're

going down!" I warned her, and shut off my motor.

With a great swoop the monoplane glided forward, and then dipped; swung sharply to the left under the influence of some air wave, then righted itself again, and swooped downward toward the advancing earth. With feet braced I held the sharp nose straight, barely grazing the trees of a high ridge, as we swirled level, steering for the open field. At that instant something happened, something which flung the speeding machine careening sharply to one side. I tugged at the wheel, but there was no time, no distance, left in which to recover. It was all in a second, a swift mad fall. I knew we struck the branch of a tree, breaking it; then another and went crashing down, turning almost completely over as we fell. I know not how it was done, but I jerked the strap from off me, and gripped her in my arms. I heard the crash, a scream—and then we were flung forward, clear of the debris, into the tangled underbrush.

I could not have lost consciousness for I realized it all; that she was within my arms, resting on me; then that she was alive, and was upon her knees, one arm lifting my head. I heard her voice, but it sounded a long ways off, and I could not answer, or move my body. Someone groaned and I could see her face, white but unscarred, looking down into mine. I tried to smile at her, but failed. Then she lifted me higher, until my head found

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